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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [KS](#) [KN](#) [CH](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: ROK DEFENSE MINISTER ON WORSENING NORTH-SOUTH
RELATIONS

Classified By: AMB. KATHLEEN STEPHENS. REASONS 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) At a January 30 dinner at the Ambassador's Residence in honor of the ROK Minister of National Defense (MND) Lee Sang-hee and other senior ROK security officials, contrasting views were presented on how the ROKG should respond to that day's statement by the DPRK that it would no longer recognize the 1991 North-South Basic Agreement and does not accept the Northern Limit Line. Representative Kim Sung-gon from the opposition Democratic Party, a former National Assembly defense committee chair, expressed concern the move could lead to catastrophe on the peninsula. He argued that peaceful coexistence was the logical path to pursue, and urged that the ROKG engage patiently to build up trust between Seoul and Pyongyang. MND Lee strongly disagreed, stating that the DPRK was nullifying agreements it did not intend to abide by in the first place. He agreed that trust was desirable, but clearly did not think it possible so long as the nuclear issue remained unresolved. The Ambassador cited the Secretary's remarks about the fundamentals of American foreign policy: defense, diplomacy, and development. She offered that South Korea was a great example and suggested all three were needed in our efforts vis-a-vis North Korea. The Ambassador and USFK Commanding General "Skip" Sharp praised and encouraged ROK peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts around the world. They also thanked their ROK counterparts for the successful conclusion of the 2009-2013 Special Measures Agreement (SMA). Rep. Kim and the Defense Minister agreed that the Korean people supported further enhancement of the ROK's global role, but made it clear they still view such efforts primarily through the lens of strengthening the U.S.-ROK alliance. Representative Kim further stated that a lack of public support for sending ROK troops to Afghanistan made that very difficult to do. All agreed, however, that the ROK could contribute to global security efforts in significant ways, and that many such "synergies" were to be found in our close alliance

relationship. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) On January 30, the Ambassador hosted a dinner in honor of the Minister of National Defense Lee Sang-hee and his spouse. The discussion focused on the DPRK's statement in the morning papers that it would no longer recognize the 1991 North-South Basic Agreement, nor would it observe the Northern Limit Line maritime boundary that has delineated North and South Korean areas of control in the West Sea since the end of the Korean War. Other dignitaries at the dinner included The Honorable Kim Sung-gon, a National Assembly member from the opposition Democratic Party, UNC/CFC/USFK Commanding General Walter "Skip" Sharp, his CFC deputy Lee Sung-chool, ROK JCS Chairman General Kim Tae-young, and MOFAT Special Representative for Special Measures Agreement Negotiations, Ambassador Cho Byung-jae.

RESPONSE TO DPRK STATEMENT

¶3. (C) The evening was largely a social occasion which included the spouses of the invited dignitaries, but a serious exchange of views did take place during dinner over what the ROKG response should be to the DPRK statement rejecting the 1991 Basic Agreement and warning of heightened tensions around the Korean Peninsula. National Assemblyman Kim said he was concerned the move could lead to catastrophe.

He said if a second Korean War did occur, neither North or South Korea would win because the outcome would be determined by the U.S. and China. He argued that peaceful coexistence, or peaceful reunification, were the only paths for South Korea to pursue. He was careful to point out that he was not criticizing President Lee Myung-bak, whom he said had good will to open up the North and make it more prosperous, but that he was concerned that the trust he said had been built up with Pyongyang by the two previous progressive ROK governments was eroding fast.

¶4. (C) Rep. Kim went on to use the analogy that North Korea was behaving like an unruly child, and that there is limited usefulness to using corporal punishment to improve the behavior of such a child. He pointed out that teachers succeed with such students only after they have worked to gain their trust. Patience, rather than stepped up patrols along the NLL, would be our wisest course of action, he concluded.

¶5. (C) MND Lee disagreed strongly but good-naturedly with Rep. Kim's point of view. He accepted that offering assistance as incentives to the DPRK could help turn the regime around, but argued that for it to work the DPRK would have to be willing to respond. He questioned Kim's assertion that trust had been established between Seoul and Pyongyang in the past, pointing out that trust could not be achieved without first addressing the nuclear issue, but that President Roh had not even raised the nuclear issue during his 2007 North-South Summit meeting with Kim Jong-il. The Minister went on to say his staff had compiled a comprehensive list of all N-S agreements and had concluded that the DPRK had decided to nullify the agreements they no longer wished to abide by. He concluded that after 41 years in uniform he had no choice but to see the DPRK regime for what it truly was.

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

¶6. (C) Earlier in the evening, the Ambassador welcomed recent news reports that the ROKG and National Assembly were working to find ways to increase the ROK's contribution to international peacekeeping and overseas assistance efforts around the world. She asked her guests about the public level of support for such initiatives. Rep. Kim and MND Lee both agreed that the Korean people generally supported further enhancement of the ROK's global role. The ROK has engaged in many MNF missions in the past, and would do more

PKO in the future, the Minister stated. He quickly added, however, that the ROK-US alliance remained the number one consideration whenever the ROKG considered taking on new international missions. Rep. Kim pointed out that although the ROK had once fought alongside the U.S. in Korea and Vietnam, support for sending South Korean troops abroad had diminished over the years, and especially since the kidnapping of ROK citizens in Afghanistan. Kim, a former chair of the National Assembly's Defense Committee who had supported extending the deployment of ROK troops to Iraq, predicted that in the current domestic political climate sending troops to Afghanistan would "be very difficult" for the ROK to do. Despite the divergent views voiced at the table, all concluded it was good to hear opposing opinions expressed so freely, and that the differing viewpoints reflected the division of opinions within ROK society today.

17. (C) The Ambassador and General Sharp praised ROK capabilities in past combat and more recent peacekeeping operations. When the Ambassador noted favorably the assistance and development programs the ROK had already and were still conducting in the developing world, the Defense Minister readily agreed, adding that he had taught that very subject at the ROK Military Academy (in particular how ROK military engineers had brought new construction methods to

Egypt). He stressed that U.S. assistance had also been a key contribution the development of those countries, commenting that he believed there were many such "synergies" in the U.S.-ROK alliance, and that it showed the U.S. and ROK could play somewhat different yet complementary roles in addressing development challenges around the world.

PRAISE FOR SMA

18. (C) Compliments were also exchanged over dinner for the successful conclusion of the 2009-2013 Special Measures Agreement. While no one was willing to predict drama free ratification by the National Assembly, none seemed too concerned about it. Ambassador Cho, whose ministry has been building support for passage of the SMA later this month "one representative at a time," said some had thought the ROKG yielded too much to U.S. when they heard about the five year agreement, but he said he explained to them that the agreement provided long term stability to both sides, and would be beneficial to the ROKG budget as a whole in the long run. All agreed it was a mutually beneficial agreement and Rep. Kim said not to worry, "as Koreans always think they have yielded too much to Washington."

THREE LEGGED STOOL

19. (C) As the discussion at the table ended with the controversial exchange of views on North Korea, the Ambassador brought the event to a close by quoting from the Secretary's introductory remarks on her first day at the State Department in which she pointed out that American foreign policy rested on three vital supports: defense, diplomacy, and development. The Ambassador offered that South Korea was an ideal example of how American efforts had combined all three elements to great success and suggested that all three elements would be needed in approaching the North Korean issue. She added two key principles: that it was vitally important that the U.S. and ROK remain in alignment on how to proceed, and that we would never accept a nuclear North Korea.

STEPHENS